Do many prostitutes have children?

Yes, they do. In the three red lights areas that Prerana is currently running its interventions, more than 95 per cent of the prostituted women have biological children. Remarkably, a recent empirical research in Mumbai's red light area shows that an exceptionally small number of prostituted women have two or more than two children.

How do brothel keepers react to the prostitutes getting pregnant?

Still their reaction to this phenomenon has several dimensions. There is one place under the sun where the birth of a girl child has always been celebrated…the criminally organized sex trade! Brothel keepers and other sex traders often welcomed the prostituted women under them giving birth to a girl child as it was a free and captive recruit to keep the trade going. With the sex trade becoming gender neutral i.e. where both girls as well as boys are traded, the birth of both types of free and captive recruits is welcomed. At the same time, pregnancy and delivery are seen as loss of business days and hence not liked. But the children of prostituted women are the instruments in the hands of the sex traders to control their mothers. Besides in the criminally organized sex trade the children like a commodity have a mortgage value.

Do children of prostitutes live with their mothers in the red light area?

The children of prostituted women live in the brothels when not being used for the business. During business hours, the children live in brothel verandahs, on the streets, or are made to sleep under the same bed which the mother is using to entertain the client. However, due to Prerana’s interventions in the red light areas, the children spend most of their time at school and in Prerana’s Centres (night care and day care). Some children have also been placed in child care institutions for long term residential care and development with due consent of their mothers and as well as the children. Sometimes mothers hire some spaces and corners in the buildings where brothels are located and use them as their personal space especially for sleeping. Sometimes they send their children to baby sitters who are either located within the red light area or in the peripheral locality.

Where do the children stay when their mothers are being used in the sex trade? What about toddlers? Is there somebody to take care of them while their mothers are being used in the sex trade?

Children stay in the shelter (day time and night time) services pioneered by Prerana and now being provided by such other service providers. Toddlers who cannot fend for themselves are sometimes mildly sedated and put to sleep in the brothels so that they do not disturb the mother during business hours. In some cases, the brothel keepers arrange for baby sitters for the children and the mothers are made to pay for those services. This arrangement is usually facilitated by the brothel keepers so that the mothers can give 100 per cent of their time to the sex trade. The brothel keepers also exercise a lot of control over the mothers by having the baby sitters control the children. In a recent trend, the pimps/aadmis attached to the specific brothel or the woman look after the toddlers.

Are children of prostitutes engaged in any kind of work related to the brothels in the red light area?
As a routine and general practice, most children of prostituted women in criminally organized sex trade; like the one in the red light areas, the children are often an inseparable part of the sex trade and are made to perform various chores allied to the sex trade. The engagement and nature of activity depends upon the sex and age of the child among other factors. Children are usually made to run errands for their mother’s customers, and that of other prostituted women, the brothel keepers, etc. Boys often work as gate boys and girls as old as 12 years are groomed to enter the sex trade. The older boys work in the local eateries, as attendants at gambling dens; engage in bootlegging and other allied activities of the sex trade. They also engage in a series of antisocial activities. However, this situation has undergone a drastic change with and after Prerana's interventions in the red light areas of the city. Needless to say, in red light areas where there is no positive social work intervention, this continues to be the plight of the children. Sometimes the older children take care of their younger siblings while their mothers are entertaining the customers. Children often turn into caregivers for their mothers who are HIV positive and have a deteriorating health condition due to co-infections. In such cases, we find that children generally tend to drop out of school to assume this role.

Do the children of prostituted women receive any kind of education?

As of today, Prerana ensures that all children in the red light area who are at an age wherein they can attend school have been enrolled in school. Prerana also ensures that there are no dropouts. Children are encouraged to go for higher education. In case of school dropouts and where children do not show an interest in being re-enrolled in a formal school setting, they are encouraged to complete their education via the open school system or are encouraged to take up vocational/skill based training appropriate to their age and aptitudes.

Do the children of prostituted women face difficulties in getting admissions in regular schools if the school authorities get to know what their mothers do? If yes, why?

No, Prerana has encountered no issues in admitting children of prostituted women to regular schools. The authorities usually know where these children come from and their special background. We insist that the mother’s name is mentioned in the school documents.

Usually at what age are the girls living in the red light area inducted into the sex trade?

Active grooming begins by the time a girl turns 12 years of age; just a little before puberty.

What is the nature of the mother-child relationship?

While some mother-child relationships are cordial, others share a love-hate relationship with their mothers. Some children share a very insecure relationship with their mothers. Some children live in denial and refuse to accept their mother’s status of a prostitute, with some of them being ashamed of what their mothers do once they come into contact with the outside world. The children have issues with the mothers constantly changing the men. These men are either their mothers’ regular customers or their pimps.

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1 Gate boys are like security guards who keep a watch on the gate to ensure that no woman leaves the brothel without an escort and without the knowledge of the brothel keeper/manager/pimp as well as to ensure that unknown person enters the brothel without the approval of the brothel keeper/manager/pimp.
Are children and mothers often separated through police raids in the brothels? In such a situation, do the mothers get to see their children again? Is it possible for the law enforcement agencies to take away the child’s custody from the mother because she is prostituted?

The situation varies from city to city and red light area to red light area. The major factor that makes the difference is the degree of training and sensitization of the police force on this issue. In Prerana’s area of operation, the child and the mother are not necessarily separated during the police raids. If a child is found in a brothel during a raid, the police take the child into protective custody and if the child is below 6 years of age, the child stays with the mother in the protective home where the mother is supposed to be and is often placed under the law. In case, the child is above 6 years of age, the child is produced before the Child Welfare Committee and is placed in a children’s home. The law gives all rights to the mother to meet the child while the child stays in the children’s home. The general provision of the law is such that a child can be taken away from its biological parent/s or legal guardians under a variety of circumstances especially if the child is found to be in need of care and protection and the best interest of the child demands separation from the parent/s or guardian/s. However, there is no provision in the Indian law that states that a woman’s child should be or must be separated from her in case she is in the prostitution trade. The decision is taken by the competent authorities on case to case basis. One can refer to the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2000 to read the definition of ‘children in need of care and protection’. Children who fall under this category are placed in protective custody.